

Have you ever heard the term – **Pregnant Pause**? It is an intentional pause in a conversation that gives the impression that what is to follow is of great significance. It is a pause to build suspense and anticipation.

In **1 Chronicles 4:9-10**, I believe we find such a pause in the Scriptures. For here, in the midst of running through the roll call of the family tree of Israel, God pauses to point out a person of significance – and this is no small thing. For this isn't God's typical *modus operandi* – He's making an important point – a point we'd do well to consider.

Do you know what's in the **1 Chronicles 1-9**? If you said the genealogy of Israel – you'd be half correct. **It's also God's cure for insomnia.** If you've ever read it; you know I'm talking truth. Yet tucked into this list of begets is powerful interlude – a pregnant pause for a man named Jabez.

In Jabez we discover a man whose life journey began in **pain**. **Pain** was the banner written over his life from birth; but pain wasn't to be his destiny. For instead of accepting his plight in life, he determined to discover God's plan. He didn't settle for the ordinary when he could have the blessing of an extraordinary God. ***He didn't allow his heredity to determine his destiny.*** He decided faith would be his guide.

As a result of his faith in God, Jabez surrendered his life to seek and discover the heart and will of God. **He wanted God's best instead of the least and leftovers.** He wasn't willing to live contently w/ what he could achieve in his own ingenuity and ability – he wanted more. **He wanted the God-more!** So he did the only thing he could do to experience God's best. He abandoned himself completely to the glory of God and sought His will through prayer.

We discover this in his short, yet amazing prayer. As a result, he's been distinctly remembered in the pages of Scripture not for what he did but for what he prayed – and for how God responded to his earnest prayer. **I wonder... would your prayer life be the distinction of your life or the extinction of your life? Is your life defined by your pursuit of God or your pursuits of gods?**

IT Matters – our faith and trust in God matters. We'll see from Jabez that our bold, audacious prayers matter to God.

The prayer Jabez lifted to the Father was simple: (1) Will You **BLESS** me so my life will count for eternity; (2) Will You **ENLARGE** me so I can live outside my comfort zone for a greater reach for Your glory; (3) Will You **WALK** w/ me that I might experience Your guidance, Your power, and Your provision; and (4) Will You **PROTECT** me so my life can accomplish everything according to Your will.

Today I want to take a few minutes to consider the heart of this prayer and its importance to our lives.

As w/ every message in this series, let me offer some context to the person and story. Ezra wrote the Chronicles to show God's elective and preserving grace to His covenant people – Israel. These genealogies are a record of God's hand on David and Judah as God's chosen agents for His glory – and how every tribe was under the banner of His love.

As God's covenant people, God promised to bless Israel for His eternal purposes – **but never at the expense of their holiness**. God wanted them to be separated and surrendered unto Him that through them, the world might discover the one true God. Sadly, not every generation/leader determined to trust the Lord resulting in Israel floundering in their intimacy and leading to a long, agonizing, and embarrassing rebellion capped off by a time in Babylonian captivity. The Chronicles were written shortly after the captivity ended to help Israel rediscover her identity. It is in this Chronicle we find the insert of Jabez.

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, "I gave birth to him in pain." Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be w/ me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request. 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

I IT Matters – We ASK to be BLESSED

Do you know the story of Eric Liddell? You might recall his story if you ever saw the movie – *Chariots of Fire*. Eric was a British missionary kid from China who made it to the 1924 Olympics in Paris as a sprinter. Due to his conviction to honor the Sabbath, he was left out of 100 meters. A few days later, he ran the 400 meters, a race he wasn't considered competitive, and he set a new world record. I read this week that when he was on the starting line an American athlete slipped his a piece of paper w/ the words from **2 Samuel 2:30** – *Those who honor me I will honor*.

Circumstance may appear to wreck our lives, but God is not helpless among the ruins. Our broken lives are not lost or useless. God's love is still working. He comes in and takes the calamity and uses it victoriously, working out his wonderful plan for our lives. *Eric Liddell*

Named *pain*, Jabez prayed for God to bless him. He didn't want pain; He wanted God's best for his life. So he went straight to the source and said, "*I want better. I want the best you have for me and I'm willing to give You all of me.*"

I reminded of Jacob, whose name meant *trickster*. Jacob too found himself at the end of misery and said to God, "*I want a different life. I want more.*" After wrestling w/ God, God changed his name to Israel and changed his his legacy.

This is where we find Jabez. He too was fed up so he prayed.

*Oh that you would **bless** me indeed...*

blessed (*barak*) to invoke Divine favor to experience the benefits of God. It is to desire to promises of God.

When Jabez asked for God to bless him, this was no cliché. Too often, when we pray for God's blessings, it is a sort of rote prayer. We mean it, but we don't really understand it.

The Hebrew word here reveals a deep emotional plea. Scholars call this a *particle of wishing*. Meaning, there's an intense and desperate wanting. Jabez isn't praying "Lord, bless me," but, "Bless me w/ an overwhelming blessing."

Swindoll called it a *divine ennoblement*. Jabez didn't want to be blessed; he wanted to be blessed w/ an extraordinary blessing. He's praying: *Bless me w/ an uncommon blessing. Lord, break through the cloud of pain and sorrow that's surrounded me since birth and overcome the limitations I've had to endure. **Make my future a contrast to my past. Give me a giant stake in Your covenant w/ my people.***

Jabez didn't want a pat on the head; he wanted a Divine encounter. He was reaching up out of his pain to grab the face of God to say – ***I want the best you have for me. I don't want less – I want more.*** I want you – all of you!

You will never experience all of Him until he has all of you. If you're looking for love in all the wrong places and looking for blessings in all the wrong spaces – you'll miss God. And he doesn't want you to miss Him.

He cannot bless us unless he has us. When we try to keep w/in us an area that's our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, God claims it. There's no bargaining w/ Him. *C.S. Lewis, The Weight of His Glory*

The key for Jabez was he was desperate so he abandoned himself to God. He wanted God's presence, power, and provision more than he wanted what he could do for himself. He wanted the God-more.

IT Matters – we desire God's blessings. **IT Matters** we never seek/settle for less than God's best.

II IT Matters – We ASPIRE to be BIGGER

*Oh that you would bless me and **enlarge** my territory!*

Do you realize what he was asking? He was asking God to do the improbable in his life. He wanted God to stretch his borders and make him bigger. He wanted God to give him greater wealth, greater influence, greater power, and greater responsibility. **Jabez asked God for wealth and power.**

On the surface this might sound selfish and self-serving – and for most people it would've been. Only Jabez truly didn't want it for his glory but for God's glory. His ambition was truly sanctified and his motivation was God-honoring.

Jabez wasn't seeking a get rich scheme to pamper his life – **he was asking God to take the limitations off his life so he could be more and do more for God.** He wanted to be all he could be for God and wanted every excuse removed.

enlarge – to bring abundance, to multiply or to stretch out.

I think Jabez realized he wasn't created for busyness but for purposefulness – he wanted to be more to do more for God. So he asked God to take him out of his comfort zone that he might experience and be used for greater things. Personally, I think his prayer reveals not only what he wanted from God, but what he was willing to give to God. He was willing to give his all. He wasn't expecting God for a hand out but a leg up. He wasn't saying bless me so I can kick back and live easy, but bless me so I can be useful for eternal things.

IT Matters we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.
IT Matters we ask Him to make us bigger for His glory.

III IT Matters – We APPEAL to be BOLDER

Let your (open) hand be w/ me...

The hand of the Lord is an *anthropomorphism* for the presence, power, and provision of God.

The interesting thing to me is Jabez specifically asks for God to be open-handed. Some scholars suggest Jabez is asking God to be plentiful and generous while others suggest that it refers to God be willing and present – like a young child reaching out to take the hold of a parent’s hand – Jabez is asking him to take him by the hand to guide him.

My son is currently transitioning from coach pitch baseball to kid pitch baseball. Do you know how much easier it is to hit a ball pitched by a coach than it is to hit a ball pitched by a kid. The kids have no fear when the coach pitches b/c they’re fairly certain the coach is going to throw it right down the middle. They don’t fear getting hit. They know the coach is trying to help them hit it. But how things change when a kid pitches. They’re not trying to help; they’re trying to strike you out. And they’re not quite as accurate.

I don’t think Jabez was asking God to make it easy, but I do think he was saying to God that if he was going to experience success, it was going to require God’s present help and guidance. God had to be more than an appendage.

The great challenge in the Christian life is we think we can live for God apart from God. We think we can be Christian w/out complete surrender and dependence on God. Not true!

IT Matters – we live in complete dependence on God. **IT Matters** God is the captain of our soul – the focus of life.

IV IT Matters – We AIM to be BETTER

...and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.

Bruce Wilkerson shares about a magazine ad w/ a Roman Gladiator in big trouble. The warrior is in the Coliseum w/ an enraged lion – only he has dropped his sword and is running for his life. The crowd is on their feet watching in horror as the panicked gladiator is desperately trying to survive. The caption of the ad reads – *Sometimes you can afford to come in second... sometimes you can't.*

This is in essence Jabez prayer – God. I'm living in a warped and wicked, fallen world. I see sin and the wages of sin all around me. I've experienced the pain of sin personally and I've witnessed the power of sin all around me. I want better and I want to be better. Rescue me from evil. Protect me.

The request of Jabez is almost identical to what the Lord provided for the Israelites in **Deuteronomy 28** – where God promised Israel that He would give His then prosperity and provision, but also that He'd protect them from invasion.

One commentator suggests that when your name means *pain* such a request wouldn't be unique. In fact, the word Jabez used for pain is the same word his mother used to name him.

This would suggest that Jabez is looking for more than future protection. I think, like Jacob, he was looking to be unshackled from the existence of sorrow and pain attached to his name. He felt if he could escape his name he could escape his plight in life. His prayer was more like – *God. Help me to not live up to my name but to Your name. Set me free from the shackles of my past so I might be released for greater things. Make me better instead of bitter.*

IT Matters we aim to be better. **IT Matters** we never settle for second best when we can have God's best. **IT Matters** we live under the hand of God's protection. **IT Matters.**

I think it is important to note that Jabez wasn't a great prophet or priest. He wasn't wise king or victorious warrior. He wasn't a just judge or even an attaché to a great ruler. He wasn't Elijah, Samuel, David, Solomon, or Daniel – he was just an ordinary man abandoned to extraordinary God who prayed a simple prayer – which God answered. As a result, his name is the one name in an endless list of names that God shines a spotlight – all b/c of a prayer of surrender.